



Succulent Gifts from Your Garden

by Pam Wallace, UC Master Gardener

Looking for an affordable gift made with love from your garden? How about a unique gift for the special gardener in your life? Or a gift for the hard-to-buy-for person who already has one of everything?

You can easily make a number of gifts using succulent cuttings. Succulents are perfect for gardening "Central Valley Style" because they love the sun and are drought tolerant. Start now, and by gift-giving time, all your creation will need is a bright bow!

Some craft ideas are: a living wreath for hanging or for use as a table centerpiece with a candle, a living picture frame for a garden or patio wall, a fairy garden, a succulent globe, or a cute basket filled with different succulents. Making these gifts is affordable--no need to go searching the garden centers for succulents. Look no further than your own--or your friend or neighbor's--succulent garden. Pinch a little here, trim a tad there, uproot a few too-crowded together, or rescue a forlorn "pup" from its parent.



Succulents are native to Mexico and South Africa. They have fleshy leaves and stems that hold and store water to help them survive drought. Most are frost tender; don't like overwatering or extreme desert conditions. Because succulents have a fairly thick skin, they are not prone to insect damage. Mealy bugs or woolly aphid are the more common pests but they are rarely troublesome and can be controlled by dislodging them off plants with water or by using systemic insecticides.

Starting/rooting succulents is fairly easy, but there are a few tricks of the trade to make it even easier. I asked Master Gardener Patty Weeks for advice.

To root succulents with stems, cut them off the main plant and let them sit for 7-10 days to "harden off" or callus. This helps avoid fungal damage to the root. For more rosette-type succulents like aloe, agave and sempervivum, pull off the "pups" or "babies" on the sides and replant them.

Plant in clean moist potting soil specifically formulated for succulents. Hormone rooting powder is not necessary. Put the pots into a tray of water for a minute or two so the soil becomes saturated, then keep the plants just slightly moist. Resist over-watering at this stage. In the spring, all succulents appreciate some light fertilizer.

Be creative in mixing different succulents together to make a design. Just as in a flower arrangements, using different colors, leaf shapes and textures adds interest.

Here are a few general instructions for crafts:

- To make a succulent wreath, purchase a wire wreath form, line with mesh, fill with soil, wrap with coco fiber, and insert cuttings in a variety of colors and shapes. If this is going to hang, you can wrap it with thin wire or fishing line until it's sufficiently rooted to hold together.
- Try making a succulent topiary with styrofoam, wire, plants and rocks.
- You can build a short box, plant it with succulents and then put an old picture frame around the arrangement - a real Living Picture. This could be hung on a wall, or legs could be added to make a small table.
- Fairy Gardens are the very latest design element. Using miniature accessories and garden accents, sedums, moss and pebbles, even tiny electric lights can turn a boring container into a Fairyland.
- Succulent globes can be made by wiring two hanging baskets together, lining with coco fiber, then filling with soil. Poke holes in the fiber and insert succulent cuttings. Keep moist by light spraying until the cuttings are rooted (a gentle tug should not loosen the cutting if it has rooted) before watering the ball.



Search online for "succulent crafts" for more ideas. The possibilities for a gift of succulents are limited only by your imagination.



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